(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes. A meeting of Passport Officers was held at New Delhi from Jan. 27-29,2003.

(b) During the meeting, the major issues that were discussed related to improving the system of issuance of passports.

(c) and (d) The Government is checking the existing loopholes/ bottlenecks by making the process of issuance of passports more efficient and transparent through computerization and decentralization of the passport issuance system. In particular, the computerization of records and machine printing of passports will ensure greater security and will make forgery of passports extremely difficult.

Joint Press Conference of Iranian President with Pakistan President

994. SHRI RUMANDLA RAAMACHANDRAYYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Iranian President, while replying to questions at a joint press conference with Pakistani Prime Minister at Islamabad laid down the blueprint of his visit to India during January 2003;

(b) if so, whether the issues relating to Iran-India gas pipeline was the dominated factor discussed;

(c) if so, what were the other agenda;

(d) the outcome of the discussions held;

(e) whether the Iranian President urged India to initiate talks with Pakistan and also back Pakistan's nuclear programme; and

(f) whether India has clearly mentioned that no talks would be held unless and until Pakistan stops infiltration into India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) In Iranian President's joint press conference with Pakistan's Prime Minister during his visit to Pakistan from 23-25 December, 2002, there were questions posed relating to India and India-Iran relations, but details of the visit to India in January 2003 were not elaborated upon.

(b) Iran-India gas pipeline was among the issues that figured during the joint press conference.

(c) and (d) The Joint Communique issued after the visit of President Khatami to Pakistan stated that bilateral, regional and global issues, including Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq were discussed between the two sides.

(e) No, Sir. However, during the joint press conference, Iranian President expressed hope that both India and Pakistan would be able to resolve their problems peacefully through reasoning and justice. Pakistan and Iran also called for peaceful resolution of all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan.

(f) India's position on talks with Pakistan is widely known. Pakistan must end its sponsorship of cross-border terrorism directed against India for talks to be meaningfuls.

Policy regarding NRIs

†995. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any "Pravasi" policy;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c) The Government recognizes the important role Pravasi Bharatiyas can play in strengthening India's relations with the countries of their settlement. It is, therefore, Government's policy to engage Pravasi Bharatiyas in a constructive and mutually beneficial manner. A High Level Committee was constituted to recommend a broad but flexible policy framework to attain this objective. The Committee made a number of wide ranging recommendations falling under the jurisdiction of various Ministries, State Governments and other agencies. Some recommendations like Revised PIO Card Scheme, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards have already been implemented by the Government. Other recommendations were sent to the concerned Ministries/Departments of the Government

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.